

## EXPLORING GREECE 2022

In October 2022 my friend and frequent traveling companion Carol and I spent three weeks in Greece. (Our last trip together was a month in India/Bangladesh in October 2019). I had last visited Greece in 2015 when I felt I did a good job of exploring Athens and did two one-week cruises in the Aegean islands (see <https://60after60.com/archives> for stories of these trips). Carol had never been to Greece and my main objective was mainland regions, so I organized several components to the trip basing in Athens between each segment.

This map shows Greece in its regional context.



After arriving in Athens (she from Texas) we spent a day doing all four routes of the Big Red Bus so she at least saw all the highlights. New to me were the 3<sup>rd</sup> C AD Roman baths uncovered when building the Metro before the 2004 Olympic Games.



Olympics being on my mind (Paris 2024) I was reminded of some history. In 490 BC a runner was sent from the battlefield at Marathon to announce Greece's victory over the Persians and then he dropped dead. This is the origin of the name of the

event. 1896 was the first modern Olympics and the 60,000-person capacity second century AD oval stadium that had been unearthed in the mid 1800's was rebuilt of marble. According to Wikipedia "When the modern Olympics began in 1896, the initiators and organizers were looking for a great popularizing event, recalling the glory of ancient Greece. The idea of a

marathon race came from Michel Bréal, who wanted the event to feature in the first modern Olympic Games in 1896 in Athens. This idea was heavily supported by Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympics, as well as the Greeks.”



Then in 1908 for the London Olympics the length of the marathon was increased from 21 to 26 miles so that the start and finish could be in front of the Royal Family. 26.2 miles became the standard in 1920.

I also remembered that the Evzones who guard the Parliament are responsible for ironing the 400 pleats in their “skirts”. They symbolize one for every year of Turkish occupation.

I had not previously discovered the tram that runs conveniently from the center of Athens (Parliament) to the coast and then serves the Saronic Gulf beaches south to Voula and north to the Port of Piraeus.



The next day we took an intercity train (4 hours) to Thessaloniki, vibrant, historic and Greece’s second largest city.

When traveling in ancient civilizations such as Greece, it is difficult to know what history to write. Even modern history which maybe starts with the incorporation of this part of Macedonia into Greece in 1912 is fraught with turbulence. Following prehistoric settlements, the city was founded in 315 BC by the Macedonian King Cassander, the Hellenistic period began with the victory of Alexander the Great over the Persians in 297 BC, and lasted until defeat of the last Macedonian king by the Romans in 168 BC whose power lasted until 305 AD.

During the turbulent early Christian and Byzantine periods all the regional powers vied for, gained and lost control, until in 1430 Sultan Murad II gained control for the Ottoman Empire which lasted until the Balkan Wars of 1912.



The city rises on the slopes of Mt. Chortiatis from the Gulf of Thessaloniki to its citadel at the top, and many of the 13th C fortified walls and towers remain.

Examples of Byzantine architecture remain from this period of its history.



A significant Jewish community from many different traditions (by the mid-16<sup>th</sup> C there were over 30 different synagogues in Salonica) was part of the region's fabric with a Jewish population of about 90,000 in 1900. However, the community began to disperse with the incorporation of Salonica into Greece in 1912, the fire of 1917 which destroyed their major neighborhoods in the lower town, followed by World War I. The Nazis invaded in 1941, expropriated and destroyed the vast Jewish cemetery with its 300,000 graves and in 1943 deported the remaining population of 56,000 to Auschwitz. Only a handful returned. Today, however, there is a very interesting new Jewish Museum, a home for the aged, a primary school and three synagogues.

Another significant population shift happened with the Treaty of Lausanne when, following Greek Independence in 1922, 348,000 Muslims living in Macedonia were exchanged for 538,000 Greeks living in Asia Minor.



We did a bus tour of the central city (upper and lower) in order to capture the overall flavor. The weather was quite hazy so we were unable to see as far as Mt Olympus (~3000 M) over the Gulf.

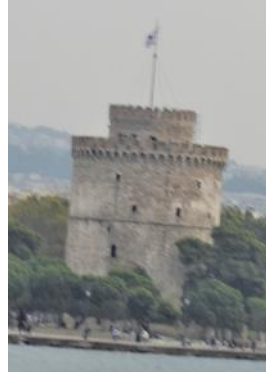


I chose to focus my visit time on the Church of St Dimitrios, built (many times) on the site of the martyring of a Roman soldier in 303 AD. Although many of the walls withstood the fire of 1917, today's structure is largely reconstructed since then and was reconsecrated in 1949. I found the mosaics beautiful and some of the early frescoes remain.



Other notable buildings on the tour are the Galerius Arch and Rotunda, the White Tower anchoring the southern extreme of the westerly wall at the gulf built by the Turks to replace a

previous Byzantine structure, and the Chain Tower at the southeast corner of the walls enclosing the Acropolis.



We stayed in the Ladadika area, part of what was the Old Port built and operated from the late 1800's to 1930 by the French company Societé Anonyme Ottomane de Construction du Port du Salonique. Many of the former warehouses are now cultural venues. The new port to the west



of the city remains a major export port for Greece and the Balkans.

At least three of the open-air markets still thrive in the center of

town as well as many restaurants and bars. We ate dinner one night at Bazagiazi in the Saul Modiano passage.



Next to a flower market the Byzantine Yahudi-Louloudalika Hammam was active until 1968 in a formerly Sephardic Jewish neighborhood.





Given my love of street art I was thrilled to see it thriving as well as some mural art.



We decided to do a bus day trip to Meteora during which we traversed the plain of Thessaly, including an enormous wetlands area formed by the Vardos/Axios river, one of the longest in the Balkans. Huge areas of cotton were ready for harvest and the area grows the majority of Greece's rice and corn.



We followed ranges of mountains which included Mt. Olympus (~3000 meters) and others considered to be the homes of the ancient Greek gods (Zeus, etc). The various regions on this trip clarified for me just how mountainous a country Greece is!



Sixty million years ago this region was a lake. Volcanoes and earthquakes uprooted and changed the region to now a very porous rock similar to Cappadocia in Turkey.

The Meteora monasteries were created beginning in the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>C by Eastern Orthodox monks seeking refuge from increasing Turkish raids. At the 16<sup>th</sup> C peak there were 24 monasteries/nunneries of which six remain active. Each one sits on its own pinnacle, one still only accessible by 700 steps from the valley floor.

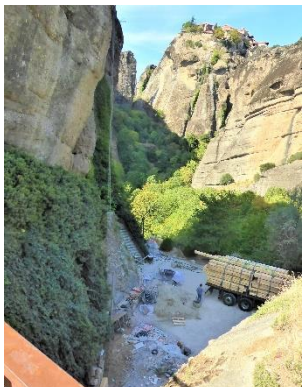


This is the one accessible only by steps. Two monasteries are open for visitors each day. We visited Verlaam created by a monk who scaled the rock in 1350 and built three churches. After his death it was abandoned for 200 years until two monk brothers began rebuilding/restoring it in 1517. It has been constantly occupied since then, currently by 11 monks who are cloistered.

Here is Verlaam (left) with Grand Merenerio in the background and our route up the steps.



Even with nearby road access (~150 steps up to Varlaam, the oldest and second largest of the monasteries) goods and building materials are still hauled up by pulley.

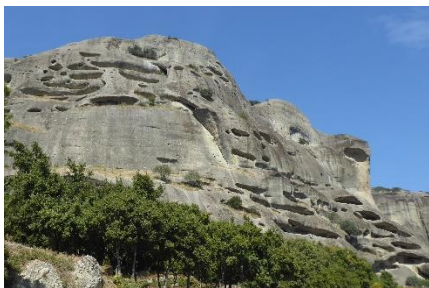


We are only at 500m elevation, but it feels much higher. No photos are permitted inside the chapels whose frescoes have been beautifully restored, but I did cheat a little, snapping photos next to the no photo sign for the chapel.





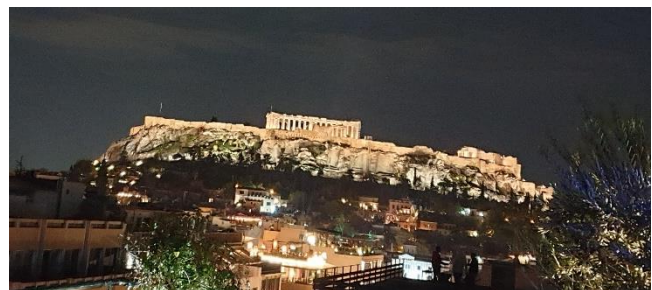
The reception hall has wonderful icons and ceiling and the exterior terraces have lovely views. Our second stop was the nunnery Roussanou, but I did not have the energy to climb again. The visit was followed by lunch at Paradisio in Karambala, family-run and specializing in local cuisine including wild pig steaks (delicious!). Yet another type of rock formation formed our lunch view.



The second phase of the trip was a tour of the Peloponnese with a focus on food as well as history and culture. Unfortunately, my seat on the return train to Athens was infested with something that resulted in major itching welts covering the back of both my thighs, and my traveling companion tangled with something stomach-upsetting. So,

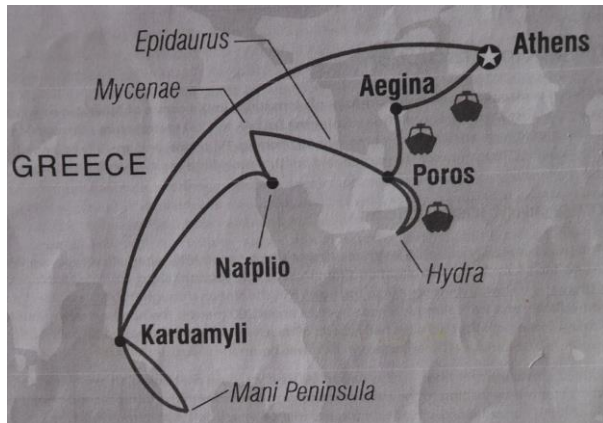
we joined the tour a day late while she recovered and I saw a dermatologist. Our Athens hotel, Attalos in the Monastiraki district, has a magnificent view of the Acropolis at night from its friendly rooftop bar.

The first stop on the tour was the island of Aegina and a visit to a pistachio farm. It is thought that pistachio trees were planted in the 19thC from Syria and/or the Greek island of Chios where I previously saw them. The weather was windy and rainy so we





didn't miss much and we were able to book a ferry for the following morning direct to the island of Poros, the second stop. Here is the overview of the tour itinerary.



The weather leaving Athens was still windy and rainy but our fast passenger ferry was snug.



After checking in to the hotel we joined the group at Odyssey Cooking School where in well-orchestrated teamwork we produced tzatziki and eggplant dips, tyrotigona (crunchy filo dough snacks filled with cheese), grilled vegetables, and baked fish with a sauce using a local tomato paste made from sun dried tomatoes.



A dessert custard completed the menu accompanied by local wines of course. Here are Carol and I with the teacher and tyrotigona ready for the oven.



The next day was a short ferry ride to Hydra Island – one completely free of wheeled vehicles (not even scooters – yay!).

Transport of goods and people is by donkey or boat.



I walked (slowly) uphill to visit the Lazaros Koundouriotis Historical Mansion, a fine example of late 18<sup>th</sup> C aristocratic residential architecture with distinctive wooden ceilings in the public rooms. In addition to period furnishings and folk crafts, I really enjoyed both the permanent and temporary artists' works on display in the galleries.



Although he never served in any office, he influenced public affairs in Hydra and together with his brother Giorgios sacrificed their family fortune by donating 120 ships (3/4 of the entire Greek navy) in support of the Greek war of independence in 1821. Many Hydriot merchants had become wealthy running the British blockade of French ports during the Napoleonic wars and in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> C. Hydra was famous for its ship builders.

Hydra lost many of its ships to the fighting, sending the island into a deep economic slump, from which sponge farming kept the island afloat (so to speak). In 1956 Sophia Loren came to play a sponge diver in the film Boy on a Dolphin which propelled the island onto the international stage which it has never left.



The Hydra flag has symbolism with the outline of the island topped with a flag with a warrior's helmet, a cross and an anchor watched over by the eye of God. The inscription translated as "with it or on it" harkens back to the Spartans' shields going into battle coming back either with it, victorious, or on it, dead.

After a lunch of slow-baked lamb (5-7 hours) there was time to meander the back streets. I



particularly noticed unusual door knockers plus the existence of a cinema club!





Poros is actually two islands with a six-foot wide canal separating the small island port/Poros town from the larger island with wooded hills, trails, multiple anchorages and beaches.



Upon returning to Poros I walked looking for a light supper and realized that the harbor I was in was occupied entirely by sailboats.



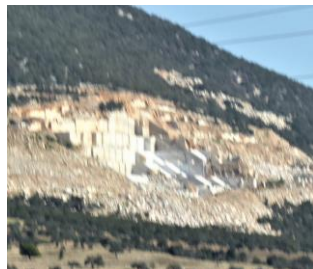
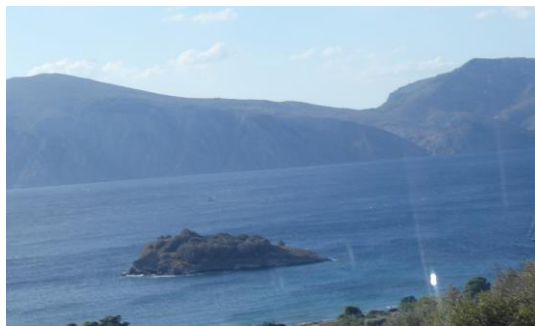
Including one from Boise, Idaho!!!

At Arpagio Taverna the patrons were clearly all regulars, asking after the family and comparing notes on sailing waters. I had the “grandfather’s” recipe of delicious marinated anchovies.



Not only humans were well accommodated.

The next day we headed to Nafplio in a private van, (our first non-public transport of the itinerary) winding through hilly territory of quarries, olives and ailerons.





Our first stop was at a small family-run apiary. I learned a lot more about bee society than I knew. The Queen lives about five years and is constantly being fertilized to produce new worker bees (gestation 13 days) who work themselves to death on average in 2-3 months. First they need to build the comb, then collect nectar in their stomachs plus pollen in their mouths which

are regurgitated with saliva into the comb. Other workers beat their wings to “solidify” the honey and yet another team creates the thin wax layer that seals it. It is this layer that is used to make bees wax candles when the comb is emptied. One level of the comb is the food for the workers. This farm is organized so that the plants are blooming at separate times thus resulting in thyme, sage, heather, etc. honey.



The tiny flowers of the carob tree were just coming into bloom when we were there. In the spring there is a spring flowers mix. They also have exhibits of other types of hives used elsewhere in the world. We tasted various honeys along with delicious local cheese and fresh-baked bread before moving on to Epidaurus.

The 16,000-seat theater from 300 BC is the most famous attraction here. The symmetry of the seating, and the perfect acoustics - a whisper spoken in the center of the 70' diameter performance area is heard in the top row - are marvels of engineering.



It hosted song contests and plays for 700 years until the Christian Emperor Theodosius II closed it down in the 5th C AD. Over time it became buried in dirt preserving it until it was unearthed in 1881 in almost perfect condition. During the summer the theater hosts festivals.

What I found particularly fascinating, however, was the hospital function of the site. In those pre-anesthesia times patients were prepared holistically for their surgery with meditation, baths and music. Limited remains of the various facilities, including a 6,000-seat sports stadium are on site. The museum contains many of the tools of the era used for surgery including for cataract surgery.



We arrived in Nafplio, checked into Hotel Agamemnon and were treated to an orientation walk of this charming town full of Venetian-influenced architecture, cannons from Florence and quality artisan boutiques.



The Old Town reminded me of Ohid in North Macedonia and another person in our group agreed. We saw the Venetian winged lion symbol on several buildings



and the neighborhood fountains (drinking water source) have Turkish written with the Arabic alphabet as was the practice until 1928 when under Ataturk they changed to using Roman writing.



Not content with two visits so far today, we finish with visiting an ouzo distillery. The owner illustrates the process of distilling where into an 800-liter copper tank, 400 liters of 96% alcohol and 50 grams of herbs per liter, (for sure anis, the rest according to each distiller's secret recipe), are placed to sit overnight.



Then 400 liters of water are added, the brew is heated until the water distills off as steam and the brew is now about 80% alcohol which is diluted to 50% (37.5% is the minimum required). The ouzo is clear until mixed with water when it turns milky white. It is similar to raki (Turkey) and arak (Sri Lanka) and in Greece is typically drunk with food. The copper vat dates from 1881 and was ordered from Paris. We tasted two different flavors of ouzo, then an aperitif. We finished by tasting a digestif, Mastika, seasoned with mastic, a resin from the small evergreen mastic tree. I quite liked it!

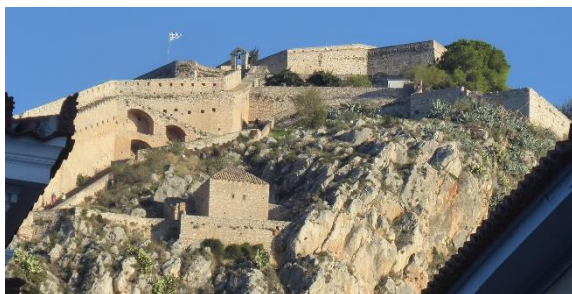
Nafplio is a peninsula protected by 3 fortresses,

Akronafplia just above the Old Town, the island Bourtzi fort and Palamidi fortress on the mainland.



Several of our group climbed the 857 stairs to it for a visit. I did not. Here are their photos looking back down at Nafplio on its peninsula

and across at Bourtzi fort and the fort at Argos beyond. During the Ottoman occupation of Greece, the Venetians re-captured Nafplio in 1686 and held it until 1715.



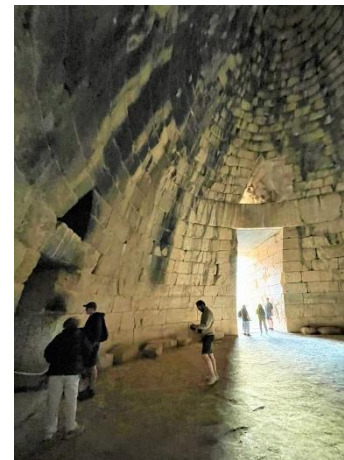


The next morning we headed to Mycenae, a fortress atop a hill that was the hub of a civilization that dominated the Greek world between 1600 and 1200 BC, a thousand years before Athen's golden age. Historians actually know little about this empire of autonomous city-states that covered the southern half of mainland Greece and a few islands. There was evidence of contact with the sophisticated Minoans of Crete and, sometime around 1200 BC they likely launched an attack on Troy, a rich city on the northwest coast of Asia Minor (now Turkey). Troy fell, the Mycenaeans were the undisputed leaders of the Aegean and then, suddenly they disappeared. By 1100 BC Mycenae was abandoned and burned and Greece plunged into four centuries known as its dark ages.



We began our visit at an incredible huge domed tomb constructed between 1350 and 1250 BC. The stones are much larger than the Egyptian pyramids - the lintel over the doorway is 26' by 16' by 3' and weighs 120 tons! The biggest stones in the pyramids were 30 tons. The domed chamber is 47' in diameter by 42' tall with an igloo-shaped dome constructed of 5-ton stones. Here is our group in front of the entrance.

Covered with dirt, by the time this Treasury of Atreus (also known as tomb of Agamemnon which it was not) was discovered in 1876, grave robbers had already been there and it was empty. However, in the walled fortress city at the top of the hill (walls 40' high, 20' thick) were found in-tact graves containing a treasure trove of gold swords, spears, engraved cups, ritual objects buried with the dead, and a gold mask of the face of a bearded man. This was the "capital city" of the empire and kings ruled from the palace whose layout was repeated in every Mycenaean city.



From the top of the fortress are seen deep ravines (today a major citrus-growing area) and the fortress of Argos. Up to 60,000 people lived here. The model in the museum helps visualize the city as it once was.



After coffee at a brand-new chic bakery/café/gift shop in Argos we went for a wine tasting



(accompanied by a lunch-full of snacks). The vintner is a scientist who worked in Holland for ten years and then returned to the area of his family’s roots. He tried growing seven different grape varieties on his land but none did well except the white which is what he grows. He buys the rest of his grapes and produces no blends.

I asked why the bottles were stored vertically and he explained that although he uses corks from Portugal they are compressed from cork bits and so there is no risk of “corking”. The basket is not full of my wine purchase! The family name Koroniotis means crown.



Later in the afternoon back in Nafplio we tasted six types of local cheese (plus a Greek prosciutto). Their truffle cheese won them an award.







In wandering back to the hotel that evening, I came across a “cruise ship/yacht” Harmony G. I was curious about it. It has 22 staterooms and can take 41 passengers. Currently it was obviously cruising in Greece, but I noticed a later cruise to Cape Verde. Something to follow in the future!



I mentioned the many high-quality artisans in Nafplio. I treated myself to a silver ring and earrings set created by brother jewelers and sold in their parents’ beautiful shop. I had also treated myself to a ring and earrings purchase from a woman jeweler in Athens.



There is also a fascinating eco-workshop producing limited-edition artist t-shirts. They host a small bookshop, a mini-museum of the textiles of the Argolis region and produce a very nice historical and natural areas map of Argolis and Nafplio. Here is one of the fine textile weavers.



A unique in my experience shop cum museum is the Worry-Bead shop. All types from synthetics to pricy amber are available and the museum explains how worry-beads are incorporated into many different faiths. Its founders traveled the world beginning in the 1970’s and opened the museum in 1998 with pieces (komboloi in Greek) dating back as far as the 1550’s.

Seeing the house where the Greek hero Dimitrio Ypsilantis lived, I suddenly had a personal question. One of my daughters lives in Ypsilanti, Michigan which I had always assumed was the name of a Native American tribe of the region. But, no, it is actually named after Dimitrio!



The Church of Saint Mary Above All Saints (originally from the 15<sup>th</sup> C current structure from the 18<sup>th</sup> C) being Venetian has a flat roof rather than a dome.



The priest posts a daily thought-provoking message

outside and a mural next to the door is an abbreviated nationalistic history of Greece!



Nafplio's central plaza, like Athens' is Constitution (Syntagma) Square celebrating the 1843 document that established a constitutional monarchy for Greece. After being one of the earliest towns liberated from the Ottoman Turks in 1922, it briefly became the country's first capital.

Despite the appeal of Nafplio, the number of abandoned buildings is a reminder that Greece's economy is still struggling.



During the Covid pandemic, they did not close their borders to visitors but put in place very strict protocols. And in 2022 they had the largest number of tourist visits ever. Here is a map of the territory covered so far in the Intrepid tour.





The next morning we head south in our van towards Kalamata with a stop at an olive farm, in the same family since the late 1800's. They grow two varieties of olives, one for oil and the other to be brined for eating. The latter are harvested by hand once all the olives on the tree are purple.



They then go into a saltwater brine for 3 weeks before they are edible. Each tree is managed individually and they are kept low by pruning three times per year. The farm is redolent with the herbs, especially mint and lemon verbena on the forest floor. Wild boars had been searching under this tree the night before.



The oil trees are also kept low and receive a heavy pruning every other year, but the harvesting is onto nets. Our host explained the process – everything goes through a crusher, then a masticator which essentially kneads it like dough.



I learned that the quality deteriorates after 1 ½ years and to avoid heat, sun, oxygen and shaking to maintain the quality. Extra virgin becomes virgin after 2 years.

We are now headed into the dramatic Mani area of the Peloponnese. Patricia Storage speaks of “Mountains that look like melting candle wax dripping into villages.” In Dinner with Persephone (1996 Random House).



We visited the city of Kalamata, our tour leader Sylvia's home town. A 1986 earthquake destroyed the old town and it was rebuilt to strict design standards with 12' ceilings, floor to ceiling windows, balconies, and a maximum of two floors.



We walked through the huge market of local food products (except the bananas) and I was surprised to see local peanut butter.

I had never seen creations such as this woman artisan made from pine cones. I wished I had room to take one home!



One of Sylvia's brothers offered us pomegranates from his stall at the market which later on Sylvia's mother illustrated how to eat. We lunched at her family's restaurant

(where Sylvia works and takes her vacation time to lead this Intrepid Tour). Here are Sylvia and her mother outside the restaurant.



Some old parts of town remain and there was evidence of (maybe refugees?) working as street market sellers.





To reach our final stop of Kardamyli, we drive 24 twisty miles south through the rugged coastal region of the Mani peninsula with stone mountains, cypress trees, wild olive groves and crystal-clear open ocean. One of the most beautiful places I have ever been!

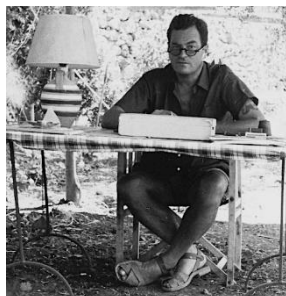


The Mani is the remotest, the wildest and the most isolated region of Greece, cut off from the rest of the country by the range of the Taygetus mountains and hemmed in by the Ionian and Aegean seas. This rocky central prong of the Peloponnese is the southernmost point of Mediterranean Europe.



The village of Kardamyli (400 permanent residents) is a quintessential mix of real-world Greece and facilities for visitors. It is first mentioned in Homer's *The Iliad* (~1200 BC), was the port of the ancient Greek city-state of Sparta, and was the jumping off point for the insurgents heading to Kalamata to wage Greece's War of Independence from the Turks in 1821.

One of our group members introduced me to the works of Patrick Leigh Fermor (1915-2011) whose travels started at age 18 walking from Holland to Constantinople, continued during



WWII service (where he was involved in capturing the German general in charge of the occupation of Crete), and off the beaten path travels in Greece and elsewhere. His fascination with this region is chronicled in Mani (John Murray London 1958).

“We came in sight of Kardamyli, a castellated hamlet on the edge of the sea. Several towers and a cupola and a belfry rose above the roofs and a

ledge immediately above them formed a lovely cypress-covered platform. Above this the bare Taygetus piled up.....It was unlike any village I had seen in Greece.



These houses, resembling small castles built of golden stone with medieval-looking pepper-pot turrets, were topped by a fine church. The mountains rushed down almost to the water's edge with, here and there among the whitewashed fishermen's houses near the sea, great rustling groves of calamus reed ten feet high and all swaying together in the slightest whisper of wind..." To me, his writings reflect the eye for detail, passion for history (even when it is fables), a combination of human sensitivity and worldly view of a traveler, writer, man of action and scholar. He mostly wrote this book while living on Hydra but then in 1959 bought a house just outside Kardamyli in Kalamitsi where he based until his death. For Fermor, Kardamyli was the jumping off point into what he calls the Deep Mani and there follow 250 pages of tales of that region.

He goes on to describe "Whitewashed ribbed amphorae for oil or wine, almost the size of those dug up in the palace of Minos (*which we will see later in our trip*) stood by many a doorway. Once more I wondered how these immense vessels were made. They are obviously too big for any potter smaller than a titan with arms two yards long. \*'We build them bit by bit from the bottom' the potter said, 'just as a swallow builds its nest.'\*...The quiet charm of Kardamyli grew with each passing hour...The kind, deep voice of the gigantic owner, a civilized and easy-going host, sitting down now and then for a chat, induced in all such a lack of hurry that the teeth of time and urgency and haste seemed all to have been drawn. The same leisurely spell pervades the whole of this far-away little town."

My reading suggests that this is still the case today except during their jazz festival in May and the summer tourist season from July to September. Some photos above are courtesy of Matt Barrett's Greece Guides article by David Rochelle and Wikipedia.



We stayed just outside of town at Kalamitsi Hotel with its own bay, beach, olive grove and vegetable garden from which produce they prepare delicious meals. The breakfast each morning was incredible with a different variety of several home-baked cakes and breads on offer each day. They happily prepared salads and meals whenever we requested.





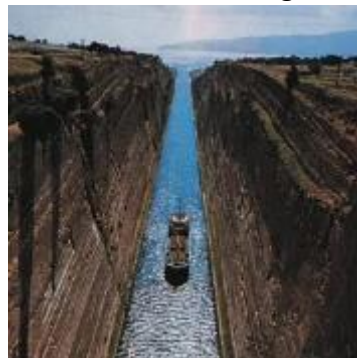
The next day various members of the group cycled, kayaked, swam, or hiked. I just kicked back and enjoyed the SILENCE – no traffic, no wind, no people. I read and arranged final details for the next phase of our trip.

In the evening we dined en famille with three generations at a local farm. We learned how to make lalagia, a deep-fried donut that can be served sweet or savory. Because it was Carol’s birthday we celebrated with a cake.

Intrepid Travel has a foundation and we had been advised to bring a small item to be auctioned as a fund raiser. The group voted to contribute the 175 Euros we raised to Intrepid’s project of Ukrainian assistance.



En route back to Athens we stopped at the Corinth Canal which connects the Ionian and Aegean seas. No locks since they are at the same elevation. It isn’t very wide but the side walls of the cut are up to 240’ high! Here is our view crossing the bridge back to the mainland, and another with a boat going through.



It handles about 12,000 boats per year but their size is limited by its depth of 26’ and width of 82’. It opened in 1893! However its four mile traverse saves nearly 300 miles of travel around the Peloponnese!

Carol and I stayed on at the Attalos Hotel and I took an organized tour to Delphi the next day. The tour leader is an archeologist and she spent the 3-hour bus ride reviewing Greek history from pre-history to modern times. We pass through recently-harvested fields and then climb into increasingly dramatic mountainous territory as we approach Mt Parnassos (8062’).





Throughout the country along the road you see small memorials to someone who died.

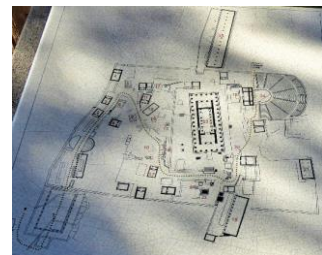
Delphi was probably the home of a prophetess as early as Mycenaean times. As the worship of Apollo (the sun god) grew, the sanctuary reached the height of its prestige between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> C BC and its autonomy was protected by a federation of cities. Even when it was conquered the sanctuary was preserved and the conquerors continued to consult Apollo through his prophetess until AD 394 when a Roman Christian ruler shut down the “pagan” site.

Ancient Delphi was not a city, but a sanctuary – a place of worship centered on the Temple of Apollo where the oracle prophesized. The site rises 700’ to the stadium, but I was content to make it to the temple. The Roman Forum stood outside the sanctuary’s main gate. Here pilgrims (all men) could purchase last minute offerings.



From Rick Steves “Picture the ruins as they were 2000 years ago: gleaming white buildings with red roofs, golden statues atop columns, and the natural backdrop of these sheer gray-red rocks towering up 750 feet.”

Here are a layout and model.



Further up the hill are a 5000-seat theater for song contests held as part of the Pythian Games which took place every four years in the stadium above. Along the Sacred Way are many sculptures and structures created by grateful pilgrims.





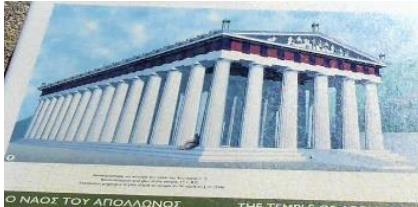


The Treasury of the Athenians temple was built to honor that victory over the Persians at Marathon and two of the columns are of marble from Paros. I was really happy to have held off Delphi until later in the trip as I was better prepared for the symbolism.

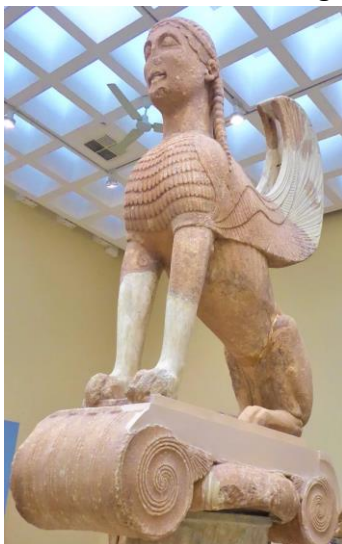
The pilgrims first bathed in Kastathian Spring east of the site. Apollo was a god of peace, order and personal virtue. Thus the oracle could address moral questions as well as religious and state affairs. Delphi was considered the center of the world and a cone-shaped monument called an omphalos (navel) marked the spot.



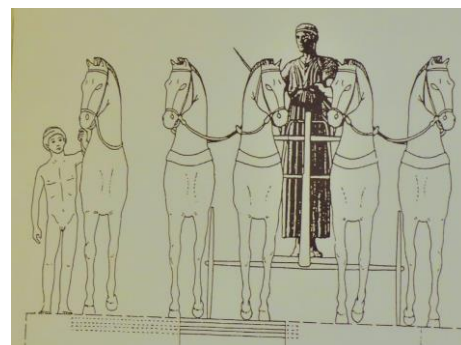
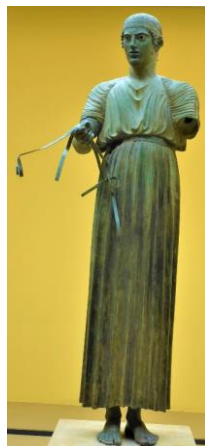
Here is a rendering of what the Apollo Temple looked like and its east pediment is preserved in the museum. This was the third temple built on this site (330 BC), was largely funded by Philip of Macedonia and dedicated in the time of Alexander the Great.



Other items I particularly liked in the museum were the Sphinx of Naxos, a winged lion with a female face that was brightly painted and sat atop a 40' column in the Sanctuary.



The remnants of the bronze charioteer were also special for me.



After its abandonment the site was covered by landslides and the village of Kasia until 1892 when the villagers were relocated to the modern village of Delphi to the west and excavation began.



After visiting the Sanctuary of Apollo, we stopped at the site of the Sanctuary of Athena, the goddess of wisdom, fertility and health. Here is a drawing of the site, which dates from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> C BC.

We stopped for lunch at Taverna Omphalos which very effectively caters to busloads of tourists but actually serves very good food at a fair price!

We also made a brief stop at Arachova, a town perched on the slopes of Mt Parnassos and serving its winter ski slopes. Fur garments were already in evidence in the shops and I couldn't



resist one of these locally-made caps for my great granddaughter.

There was a funeral procession on the narrow main street as we arrived.

In the evening we celebrated Carol's birthday again at a folklore restaurant. The singing and dancing were varied and excellent and so was the food which sometimes isn't the case!







On Sunday morning after getting negative Covid tests as required within 48 hours of our Monday morning cruise departure, we took a taxi to Lavrio, the port from which Celestyal Olympia would depart mid-day Monday. Lavrio is a small town that has recently been upgrading its port facility. It is served by ferries and has a small boat harbor and sailboats for rent. It anchored an area that was historically a center for silver mining and the source of much of the country's wealth from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> C BC. I liked these sculptures near the town hall.

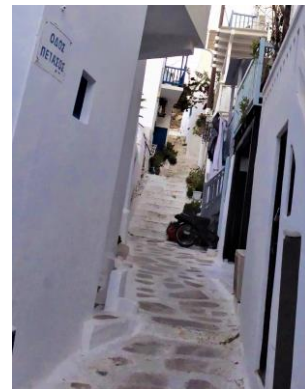
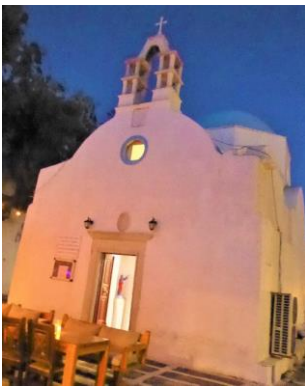


We had a pleasant mid-day meal at a restaurant full of Greek families enjoying a Sunday outing together.

At the far end of the port is a large storage yard that I had seen as we were driving into town. It is for ailerons and looking at them disassembled and up close I realized how really huge they are!

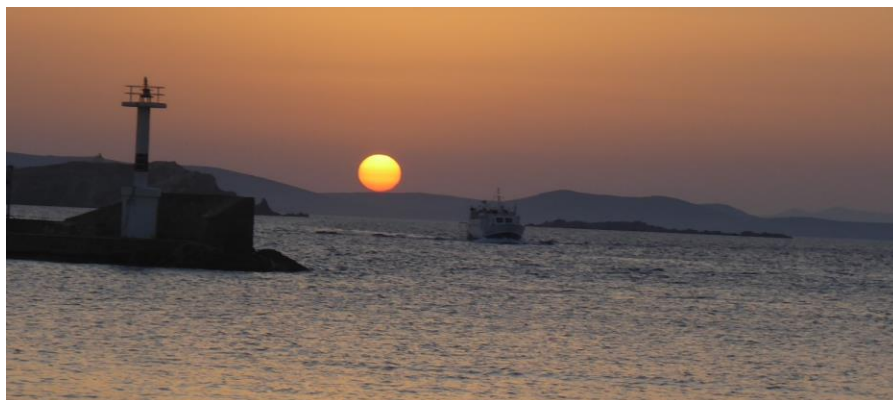


Our four-night cruise was fully packed with two stops per day, but would give Carol a taste of the Aegean islands. So after sailing at 1 pm we arrived in Mykonos early evening after supper. This is a party town that was pulsing even in late October. I had visited previously so just wanted to meander and absorb the vibe. It was also different to be there at night. Its trademark windmills stretch on a ridge overlooking the town and I had forgotten that it is known for the huge number of small chapels mostly built and maintained by individual families to honor a namesake saint and give thanks for the safe return of a seafaring relative.



The maze of small lanes helps buffer the strong prevailing winds and served to discourage pirates and invaders. I managed to get myself hopelessly lost and was worried I might miss the last tender back to our ship.

It is also an unusual harbor with pebbles and a sand beach.





The next morning we are scheduled to stop at Kusadasi for an included visit to Ephesus. However, we realized that Carol could not handle the terrain, I had had an excellent visit on my prior trip, and there weren't any other appealing excursion options. So, even though we had each paid €50 for a Turkish visa, we stayed on board for the morning and were refreshed for the afternoon on Patmos, the one island stop I had not previously visited.

We did a nice bus tour of the island and then a walking tour of Choros, its capital which is at the highest point on the island. It, too, has narrow lanes and I was impressed by door knockers.



Our guide is a British artist who has lived there 30 years. She explained that the homes started out as simple cubes with gardens, but as family sizes grew they added on laterally and then vertically. All must conform to the historic style and be freshly whitewashed every spring. It is very laid back with many small villages and only one 5\* resort. Tom Hanks is among the owners there. The island is crowned by the monastery of St John the Theologian, author of the Book of Revelations and receives many Christian visitors.



It has windmills that date from 1588. We had superb views down to the port of Skalas, our ship and nearby islands.



Olympia is medium-sized (1664 passengers), large enough to offer constant on-board entertainment (classes, gym, pool, casino, spa services) and varied evening programs.



With the intense schedule of ports there wasn't much chance to partake. We chose to take our lunches in the Magellan dining room with full table service, skipping the buffet. People were seated for breakfast and dinner as they arrived, so we had the chance to converse with a wide variety of our fellow passengers. Interestingly our well-trained sommelier, Yasser, is Egyptian and doesn't drink alcohol.

I always love the towel animals that the cabin staff create and this one was new to me!



We next have a morning stop in Rhodes. I was happy that the included excursion was to Lindos since I had had a great early morning walk in the medieval town of Rhodes on my prior visit with Club Med 2. Lindos was a long walk down the hill from the tour bus drop-off point and we missed the opportunity for the connecting shuttle bus. There was no way I was going to climb the 300 steps to the fortress, but fortunately the village has



many other interesting sites.

The fortress was built in the 14<sup>th</sup> C by the Knights of St John to protect the island against the Ottomans. The archeological remains of several prior temples also share the acropolis site.

The Byzantine Panagia church (1490) is in the center of the village (photo Marc Ryckaert) and has some of the most beautiful murals (18<sup>th</sup> C) I saw on the whole trip.





The floor of black and white pebbles was familiar as I had marveled at this type of flooring in many locations on this trip. I really wonder about the source of the pebbles! There were some at private dwellings also.



The village has many fine artisan shops and donkeys to help with transport (plus a golf cart service up the hill for disabled people which we used).

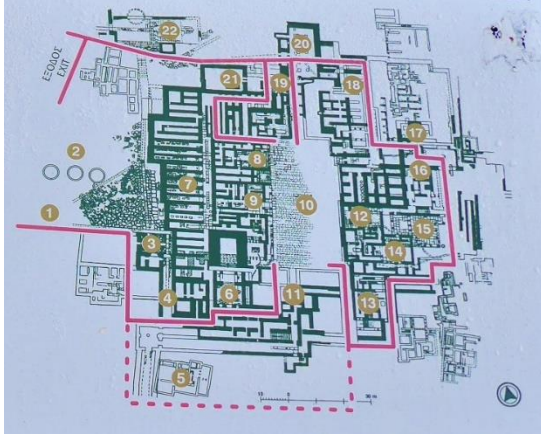


Apparently it is also known for a fine beach which we did not see. (stock photos)



The next day we started out by visiting the Minoan Palace of Knossos, the largest of all the palaces in Crete. The site was first extensively settled in the early Neolithic period (6700-3200 BC). The first palace was built around 1900 BC It was destroyed around 1700 BC and the New Palace was built in its place. It is comprised of different buildings around a central court: the west wing includes shrines, official halls and extensive storage areas and the east wing the “Royal Apartments” and workshops. The palace stores occupied sixteen rooms, the main





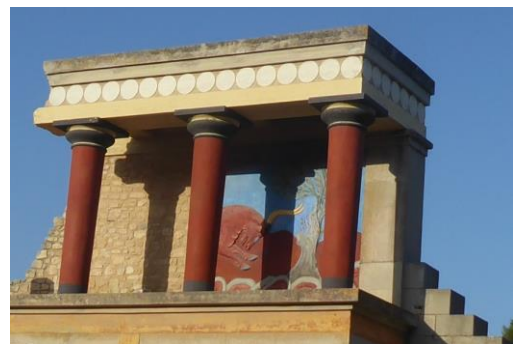
feature in these being the pithoi that were large storage jars up to five feet tall. They were mainly used for storage of oil, wool, wine, and grain.



The complex displays a wide variety of architectural features: storeys with flat roofs on different levels, indented and protruding facades, embellishments of stone horns and alternating colors. A great variety of materials was also used: slabs of green schist for floors, wooden columns, gypsum slabs on walls, floors, etc. Polychrome plaster and wall paintings contributed to room decoration.



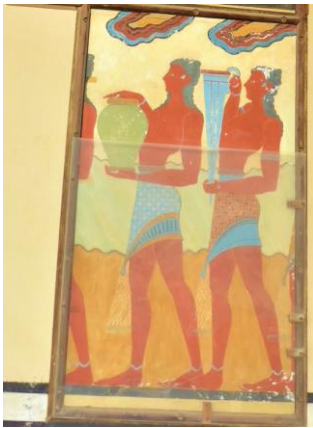
The palace includes the Minoan column, a structure notably different from Greek columns. Unlike the stone columns that are characteristic of Greek architecture, the Minoan column was constructed from the trunk of a cypress tree, which is common to the Mediterranean. While Greek columns are smaller at the top and wider at the bottom to create the illusion of greater height, the Minoan columns are smaller at the bottom and wider at the top, a result of inverting the cypress trunk to prevent sprouting once in place. The columns were plastered, painted red and mounted on stone bases with round, pillow-like capitals.





The palace had at least three separate water-management systems: one for supply, one for drainage of runoff, and one for drainage of waste water.

Excavations first took place in 1878 then systematic excavations began in 1900 under the direction of Arthur Evans of Oxford. During the first years of excavation the team focused on protecting the ruins, however after 1925 they tried radical reconstruction using concrete which is very controversial. However, the result does provide the visitor with a better means to appreciate the architecture of the palace. The same can be said of the relief wall paintings re-created from fragments. The chambers and corridors were decorated with frescoes showing scenes from everyday life and scenes of processions.



This room was thought to be the “throne” room.



Warfare is conspicuously absent. The fashions of the time may be seen in depictions of women in various poses. They had elaborately dressed hair and wore long dresses with flounced skirts and puffed sleeves. Their bodices were tightly drawn in round their waists and their breasts were exposed.

The Palace of Knossos continued in use after 1450 BC when the rest of the Cretan palaces were destroyed. Most experts believe that the new inhabitants were from the Mycenaean Greek mainland. When it ceased to function is uncertain.

We had time to visit Heraklion which flourished as an important harbor of the Byzantine Empire and under the Venetians who built the Koules Fortress in the harbor.



However in the 16<sup>th</sup> C the entire island was captured by Turks who occupied it until the early 20<sup>th</sup> C. The architecture reflects all of these influences.



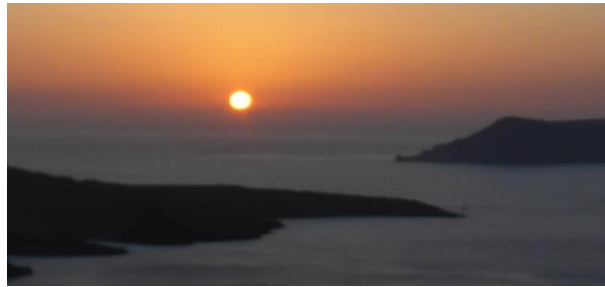
My souvenir of choice was an olive wood wine bottle cork stopper. I was also very excited to find a potter who made a wall hung vase for dried flowers that I had been searching for!

Our final stop was the island of Santorini which was created by volcanic activity over two million years. In fact, it has continued to evolve from eruptions in the 20<sup>th</sup> C. When arriving by cruise ship we traversed a caldera with water 1000 feet deep and were looking at cliffs of the main town Fira rising another 1000 feet above the water.



We were invited to watch the sunset from Oia on Santorini. However, by the time our turn came to disembark we were only able to make it up the cable car to Fira and find a café by sunset. Donkeys or walking were the alternative.





Not a spectacular sunset but a perfect way to conclude a three-week Greek holiday.

With the supplemental reading I did after the trip and the variety of travel experiences, I came away with a beginning appreciation of the complexities of Greek culture, customs, sociology, languages and nationality.